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ABSTRACT

The report is a comprehensive survey of incoming freshmen at the University of Maryland at College Park (UMCP). The profile includes 2493 new students surveyed during their summer 1997 orientation. The student make-up included 53 percent males and 47 percent females; 64 percent were Caucasian and 36 percent were from minority ethnic or racial groups. Among the minority groups, 14 percent considered themselves African-American and 12 percent Asian/Asian-American/Pacific Islander. Most of the students lived in residence halls. Among the findings were: (1) 57 percent felt high school had prepared them for college while 16 percent said high school had not prepared them well; (2) the most popular reasons for attending college were to get a better job and self-development; (3) most students intended to go on to graduate school; (4) reasons for choosing UMCP included cost, location, programs and reputation; (5) students expected the most difficult adjustment to college to be time management and efficient studying, and the easiest adjustment to be getting to know other students; (6) 46 percent said they would not work during their first year of school; and (7) 70 percent of students said they would likely use counseling services to help with education and career plans. (DM)

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A PROFILE OF INCOMING FRESHMAN STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND AT COLLEGE PARK, 1996-97

Carolina Quinonez and William E. Sedlacek

Research Report # 10-97

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UNSC 96-97

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Summary

The following profile was compiled from the responses of 2493 incoming freshmen at the University of Maryland at College Park during the 1996 summer orientation. Fifty-three percent of the sample was male and 47% was female. Sixty-four percent of these students identified as (non-Hispanic) Caucasian and 36% represented ethnic/racial minority groups, with African-American and Asian/Asian-American/Pacific Islander comprising the larger minority groups (14% and 12%, respectively). Most of the students lived in residence halls. A smaller percentage lived with their parents.

Just over half the sample felt that high school prepared them for college. Some of the more popular reasons for attending college included getting a better job and general self-development. A very high proportion of the students intended to eventually obtain a post-graduate degree. Some of the main reasons these students reported for choosing to attend UMCP were cost, location, availability of programs they sought, and reputation of a particular program or school.

Incoming students expected the most difficult adjustment to college would be time management and studying efficiently, and the easiest getting to know other students and deciding whether (or how much) to get involved in campus activities. Over half of the students believed that time would be the single greatest barrier to their involvement in campus organizations. While most incoming freshmen have had work experience in the past, 46% indicated they did not intend to work during their first year at the university.

Most incoming freshmen expressed interest in improving their learning skills. Of all the counseling or educational skills services offered at the university, 70% of the students reported they were most likely to seek counseling regarding educational and career plans. Eighty percent of the respondents felt confident that they would have support should they encounter school-related difficulties.

UNSC 96-97
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The University New Student Census was administered to 2493 incoming freshmen during their summer orientation to the University. Fifty-three percent of the sample was male and 47% was female. Most of these students were 17 (37%) or 18 (60%) years of age at the time they completed the survey. Their racial/ethnic composition was mainly Caucasian (64%). The largest racial/ethnic minority groups represented by this class were African-American (14%), and Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander (12%). This was followed by Hispanic/Latino (5%) and Native American/American Indian/Alaskan native (< 1%). Two percent of the students reported being biracial or multiracial and another 2% responded "other". The majority of incoming freshmen (82%) lived in residence halls or with their parents (15%). Most had their health insurance covered by their parents (77%). Three percent had no health insurance coverage and 10% did not know their health insurance status. Sixteen percent of the responding students reported ranking in the top fifth of their class in high school; 23% in the top tenth; 35% in the top quarter; and 23% in the upper half of their graduating class. Two percent ranked in the lower half and less than 1% in the bottom quarter of their graduating class in high school.

Educational/Career Development

The principal reasons incoming freshmen had for going to college were to get a better job (26%) and for general self-development (23%). Other popular responses included to prepare for graduate school (15%) and to gain a general education (12%). Most of the students would like to go on for a post-graduate degree. Forty-two percent reported the intention of obtaining a masters degree, 20% a doctorate, 13% a medical degree and 6% a law degree.

Adjustment to College

Over half of the sample (57%) felt that high school prepared them well for college. Sixteen percent felt high school did not prepare them well for college and 27% were neutral. Most expected the easiest adjustment to college would be getting to meet and know other students of both sexes (35%), followed by deciding whether (or how much) to get involved in campus organizations (20%), selecting a field of study or career (13%) and being independent (11%) . The hardest expected adjustment was believed to be budgeting time wisely by 32% of the students and studying efficiently by 24%. Meeting financial expenses and earning satisfactory grades each was expected to be the most difficult adjustment for 9% of the students. Another 8% expected selecting a field of study or career to be most difficult.

Just over half of incoming freshmen (52%) perceived having no time as the single biggest barrier to getting involved in campus activities. Other perceived barriers to involvement in campus life included shyness (15%), not being sure how to get involved (10%), and conflict with work schedule (9%).

Retention

Almost one quarter of the incoming freshmen (24%) felt the most likely reason why they would remain at the university until completion of their degree would be to get a better job. Another 24% believed that a college degree is the only way to enter their chosen profession. Twenty-eight percent saw obtaining their degree as a necessary step to graduate or professional school. Eight percept reported being motivated by the notion that college graduates make more money. Only 4% responded that their motivation stemmed from enjoying academics.

When asked what would be the most likely reason they would leave the university before receiving a degree, over a third of the students (35%) responded that they were certain they would receive the degree. Nineteen percent mentioned cost would be the most likely reason they would leave prior to graduation. Fifteen percent would leave school to accept a good job and 9% would leave due to disinterest in their field of study.

Major

The most popular intended majors among incoming freshmen at UMCP were business and management (general) (8%), biological sciences (general) (7%), computer science (6%), engineering (general) (5%), journalism (news/edit) (5%), letters and sciences (4%), civil engineering (4%), and psychology (4%). While only 15% reported being undeclared, 34% agreed or strongly agreed that they are not sure of their major and another 12% felt neutral. Only 16% of them expected to change their major at least once before they graduate and half of those surveyed expressed confidence in their choice of intended major. Fourteen percent of the students voiced interest in designing their own major rather than choosing one that is already established.

Work

Most of the new freshmen have had work experience in the past. Thirty-six percent reported having worked at least part-time during the school year and full-time during the summer, while another 22% worked part-time both during the school year and the summer. Twenty-two percent indicated that they had held summer employment solely and only 4% responded that they have never had a job. When asked about employment plans during their first year at the university, 46% indicated they did not intend to work. Twenty percent indicated they would work off-campus. Six percent planned on working in a federally-funded work/study program and 13% expected to be employed in other on-campus work. Thirteen percent of the respondents indicated that their work status during their freshman year would involve more than one of the given options. At the time they completed the survey, almost a quarter of the students (23%) did not have a job lined up but they hoped to find one. While 80% believed their staying in school was not dependent on working at least part-time, 19% of these students believed they will need to work to remain enrolled in school.

Job Placement and Expectations

Twenty-eight percent of the students agreed that they did not expect trouble getting a job after graduating and another 12% strongly agreed with the statement. Eighteen percent agreed that they expect to have difficulty getting a job after graduation and 4% strongly agreed. Fifty-seven percent of incoming freshmen expected no problems balancing job and personal life after

they left school. Fourteen percent, however, disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting that they expected some difficulties in balancing their personal and professional life.

Attitudes Toward UMCP

The main reason most of these students decided to attend the University of Maryland was relatively evenly distributed among four categories: it offered the kind of academic program they sought (23%), the reputation of a specific program or school (21%), its relatively inexpensive cost (21%), and its geographical location (20%). Of the colleges these students applied to, UMCP was the first choice for 40% of the students, the second choice for 27%, and third choice for 10%. Six percent of incoming students indicated that UMCP was ranked lower than their third choice but was not their last choice, while 3% indicated that it was their last choice of schools. Eleven percent of these students reported that UMCP was the only school to which they applied. When asked how they related to the statement, "UMCP is one of the best universities in the country", 16% strongly agreed, 41% agreed, 36% felt neutral, 6% disagreed, and 1% strongly disagreed. Almost forty percent (39%) indicated that they followed one or more UMCP athletic teams and a fifth of the respondents indicated that they did not.

Academic Issues

Ninety-eight percent of freshmen felt their family has always wanted them to go to college. Less than one percent reported that their relatives did not expect them to go to college. Most of the students (80%) felt confident that they had someone to listen to them and help them should they encounter problems related to school. Seventeen percent were neutral and 3% did not feel

confident that they had such resources.

Thirty-four percent strongly agreed (8%) or agreed (27%) with the statement, "I expect to have a hard time adjusting to the academic work of college." Another 37% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. The remaining 29% agreed (24%) or strongly agreed (4%) with it. Sixty percent of responding students felt confident that it would not be very hard to get a B (3.0) average at UMCP. Thirty-one percent were not sure whether attaining a B average at UMCP would be very hard or not. Nine percent expected it to be difficult to obtain a B average.

Approximately one quarter of incoming freshman students agreed (24%) and another 13% strongly agreed with the statement that they did not expect difficulty with math courses, whereas almost one in four felt neutral (24%). Twenty-two percent did not very confident in their ability to perform in math courses and 17% did not feel confident at all. In contrast, incoming freshmen felt more confident in their ability to perform in English courses. Twenty-three percent strongly agreed and 45% agreed that they expected to earn good grades in English courses. Twenty-five percent were neutral and less than 7% did not expect to earn good grades in English.

When asked what kind of learning experience they preferred, 36% reported group study in small groups. Another 28% reported preferring a combination of a large group lecture once a week and small group sessions with assistants. Most students (77%) agreed or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable working with others on a group project, while 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The majority of incoming students strongly agreed (17%) or agreed (54%) that they expected that for the most part, courses would be stimulating and exciting. Less than 4% disagreed (4%) or strongly disagreed (<1%) with that expectation. Approximately one third of the incoming class (34%) did not anticipate problems getting the classes they wanted and another

36% did. The remaining 30% were neutral. Only seven percent of incoming freshmen strongly agreed that most instructors would act like they really care about students and another 37% agreed with the statement. Thirteen percent disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed with the statement, while 42% did not agree or disagree with it.

Almost 2% of the students believed that chances are good that they would drop out temporarily before completing the bachelors degree and another 6% were uncertain. Forty percent of the incoming students expected that they would receive the bachelors degree and another 29% the bachelors degree plus a graduate or professional degree from the University of Maryland. Two percent expected to receive their bachelors degree and another 26% both bachelors and graduate/professional degrees from another institution(s). Incoming freshmen were evenly distributed on their concern about their ability to finance their college education (19%, 22%, 17%, 21%, 20%, respectively, from strongly agreed to strongly disagreed).

Computer Use

Sixty-five percent of the incoming students indicated that they would be using their own computer. When questioned about which type of computer they were most comfortable with, most indicated IBM or IBM compatible PC (69%). Nineteen percent felt most comfortable with Apple/MacIntosh and 3% reported "other". Eight percent maintained they did not feel comfortable with computers. Seventy-three percent of the students were confident about their knowledge of computers. Nine percent agreed and 4% strongly agreed that they did not know how to use a computer. Almost three quarters of the respondents reported feeling comfortable using Windows and 13% did not. A similar number (12%) did not feel comfortable using any

word-processing programs. Seventeen percent were not certain and 71% reported feeling confidence in using word-processing programs. Forty-two percent of the students agreed or strongly agreed (21% each) with the assertion that they feel comfortable surfing the Internet. Another third of this year's incoming class, however, disagreed (18%) or strongly disagreed (16%).

Extracurricular/Social Activities

Given some free time almost half (44%) of incoming freshmen indicated they would most likely spend it socializing with friends. Others responded they would most likely spend it participating in sports/athletics (19%) or exercising/individual sports (12%). Five percent indicated they would read a book, while others preferred watching television (3%) or seeing a movie (1%). Seven percent of the respondents reported that they would get a job, and 2% responded that they would most likely do volunteer work during free time. When asked which extracurricular activity is of the most interest to them, the most popular responses were intramural sports or activities (40%), followed by participating in a musical or dramatic organization (13%), student publications/communications (9%) and special interest groups other than sports, games, hobbies, etc. (9%). Other responses included volunteer services, political or social action groups, and "other" (each 7%) and religious groups (3%) and departmental subject matter groups (4%).

The incoming class of 1996-97 felt relatively confident about their leadership skills. Only 12% felt they did not have the skills to be a leader on campus. Thirty-six percent agreed that they had the skills necessary to be a leader on campus and one fourth strongly agreed with the

statement. Just over half of these freshmen (53%) expect to participate in some form of intramural sports at UMCP. Almost one quarter of the respondents (23%) did not expect to participate in intramural sports and another fourth (24%) felt neutral. Twenty-two percent agreed or strongly agreed that they planned to join a fraternity or sorority. One in four (25%) strongly disagreed and 16% disagreed, suggesting that they did not plan to join a fraternity or sorority while at UMCP. Forty-five percent of the responding sample did not expect to be involved in religious activities at UMCP. Twenty-eight percent indicated that they did expect to become involved in religious activities on campus.

Three percent of incoming freshmen strongly agreed and another 14% agreed that they expected to have a hard time adjusting to the social life in college. Sixteen percent, however, strongly disagreed with the statement. The largest number (42%) disagreed with the statement and another 26% were neutral. Only 12% of incoming students indicated that they expect to be lonely during their freshman year. Sixteen percent did not agree or disagree with the expectation. The majority (72%) did not expect to be lonely during freshman year.

Help-Seeking Behaviors

When asked which area would they most likely be interested in seeking counseling or educational skills services while at UMCP, the more popular responses were counseling regarding educational and career plans (37%), learning to study more efficiently (24%), and improving writing skills (10%). Eighteen percent of the students indicated they were not interested in seeking any counseling or educational skills services at the time.

Seven in ten incoming freshmen reported an interest in seeking counseling regarding career

plans and only 11% of them denied any interest in vocational/career counseling. In contrast, most students (92%) denied any interest in seeking counseling for problems with alcohol. Similarly, only 8% of the respondents expressed an interest in counseling regarding social or emotional concerns, and 73% denied an interest in such services.

Most incoming freshman students(84%) expressed interest in improving their learning skills and only few (<4%) did not profess any interest. The new class' knowledge about where to go seek help for reading and study skills at UMCP was varied (12%, 28%, 27%, 24%, and 9%, respectively from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

Socio-Political Attitudes and Awareness

The two issues this year's incoming freshman students believed were currently the most important for US society to resolve were racism (27%) and crime (27%). Other responses included: the integrity of those in power, environmental concerns, the economy, and drug abuse (9% each). Sixty-six percent of the students intended to vote in the '96 Presidential election. Seven percent did not intend to vote and another 12% reported being undecided. Sixteen percent of those surveyed were ineligible to vote in the election.

Thirty-eight percent of the incoming freshman students agreed that most of their friends are of their own race, with another 17% agreeing strongly with this statement. Eighteen percent were neutral. Another eighteen percent disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed, suggesting that most of their friends are of a different racial/ethnic background than their own. Sixty-one percent of the students reported having a close friend of a different race. A large number, however, disagreed (20%) or strongly disagreed (8%) with the statement that they had a close friend of a

different race. Most students (88%) expressed that they looked forward to meeting people different from themselves at UMCP and only 2% denied any interest in meeting people of diverse backgrounds. Twenty-nine percent of the students reported being able to speak a language other than English well. Most (55%), however, indicated they did not speak another language well. More than half of these students reported agreeing (33%) or strongly agreeing (20%) that they discuss topics related to cultural awareness with their friends. However, one in five of the incoming students reportedly do not address such subjects with their friends.